

The Arctic: A Canadian parliamentary chronology

THIS SELECTIVE CHRONOLOGY LISTS SIGNIFICANT events pertaining to Canada and the Arctic that have occurred over the last 40 years, giving particular emphasis to Canadian parliamentary events, including debates, motions, reports and legislation.¹ Key events that took place before that period include the acquisition by Canada of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870; the transfer to Canada by the United Kingdom of "all British possessions on the American continent not hitherto annexed to any colony" in 1880, subsequently confirmed in the 1895 *Imperial Colonial Boundaries Act*; the various relocations of the Inuit by the federal government to enhance Canada's claim to sovereignty (1930s and later); the entering into operation in 1957 of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line to provide radar monitoring of the upper edge of the North American landmass; and the establishment of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) in 1958.²

1969

May 15: Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau makes a statement in the House of Commons outlining the government's policy regarding the question of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic in light of the planned summer passage of the US tanker *SS Manhattan* through the Northwest Passage and into the Beaufort Sea: "The Canadian government has welcomed the *Manhattan* exercise, has concurred in it and will participate in it."³

September: *SS Manhattan* travels through the waters of the Northwest Passage accompanied by Canadian icebreaker CCGS *John A. Macdonald* and by the US Coast Guard icebreaker *Northwind*. A second voyage is subsequently permitted in 1970.

May 30: The House of Commons Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development (SCIAND) tables its third report, which states:

Canadian sovereignty over islands of the Arctic archipelago and to the continental shelf in the Canadian Arctic is well established. However, the extent of sovereignty over waters within the archipelago is less certainly defined. Prompt and positive action by the Government is required to define the extent of Canadian Sovereignty.⁴

December 16: SCIAND tables its report examining Arctic sovereignty, Arctic marine transportation, the Coast Guard and the risk of Arctic oil pollution. The committee recommends "that the Government of Canada indicate to the world, without delay, that vessels, surface and submarine, passing through Canada's Arctic Archipelago are and shall be subject to the sovereign control and regulation of Canada."⁵

1970

March 2: Secretary of State for External Affairs Mitchell Sharp informs the House of Commons that Canada has agreed to permit a second voyage of the *SS Manhattan*.⁶ The voyage takes place in April.

April 8: The *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 1970 c. 47 (now R.S.C. 1985, c. A-12). This legislation enables the Canadian government to assert jurisdiction within 100 miles offshore for the purposes of pollution control.

An Act to Amend the Territorial Seas and Fishing Zones Act is also introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as R.S.C. 1970, c. 45 (1st Supp.). It aims to establish a 12-mile territorial sea and the authority for the creation, by order in council, of exclusive fishing zones in the sea adjacent to the coasts of Canada.⁷

April 17: The debate at second reading of Bill C-203 focuses to a large degree on the subject of Canadian sovereignty in the waters of the Arctic archipelago, causing Mr. Sharp to say, "We regard the waters between the islands as our waters, and we always have."⁸

1972

The telecommunications Anik A1 satellite is launched. In 1973 the satellite begins to transmit telephone, radio and television services to the North, providing northern Canadians with live programming and stable communications.⁹

1974

March 13: An agreement between the Canadian and Danish governments relating to the delimitation of the continental shelf between Greenland and Canada comes into force. The status of Hans Island is not resolved.¹⁰

March 22: The federal government announces in the House of Commons the creation of an inquiry to consider the economic and social consequences for northern residents of a pipeline from the Mackenzie Valley to Alberta.¹¹ The inquiry is to be chaired by Justice Thomas Berger. The pipeline is to enable the transport of natural gas from the Arctic Ocean to Alberta. The inquiry issues its report in April 1977.

1975

The first comprehensive land claim in the northern regions is settled. The *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* is signed, to come into effect in 1977. Subsequently a series of other comprehensive land claims are settled.¹²

1976

November 19: The Canadian government announces in the House of Commons that it will bring into force a 200-mile fisheries zone in the Arctic by 1 March 1977.¹³

1977

April 26: Willie Adams from Rankin Inlet, Northwest Territories, is the first Inuk to be appointed to the Senate of Canada.¹⁴

April: The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry report concludes that a pipeline from the Mackenzie Delta down the Mackenzie Valley to Alberta is feasible, but should proceed only after further study and settlement of native land claims.¹⁵

1982

December 10: The *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* is signed by Canada. It is not ratified by Canada until 7 November 2003.¹⁶

1985

March 13: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence Erik Nielsen announces in the House of Commons that the government has approved an agreement with the United States to modernize the North American Air Defence Surveillance and Warning System. Mr. Nielsen says, "Canadian sovereignty in our north will be strengthened and assured for the future." The agreement is signed on March 18. The DEW Line is to be replaced with a North Warning System.¹⁷

June 20: Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark makes a statement in the House of Commons regarding the planned voyage of the US icebreaker *Polar Sea* through the Northwest Passage. He says, "The action that is being taken by the Government of the United States does not compromise in any way the sovereignty of Canada over our northern waters, or affect the quite legitimate differences of views that exist between Canada and the United States on that question."¹⁸

August: USCGC *Polar Sea* makes its voyage through the Northwest Passage. Newspapers report that the government has granted permission for the crossing, but that no such permission had in fact been sought by the United States.¹⁹

September 10: Mr. Clark announces in the House of Commons several measures to affirm Canadian Arctic sovereignty, including a proposal to construct a new Polar Class 8 icebreaker and Cabinet's adoption of an order in council drawing straight baselines around the Arctic Archipelago. The order is to take effect on 1 January 1986.²⁰

September 24: A bill to amend the *Canada Shipping Act* is introduced in the House of Commons. This legislation would also have amended the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act*, but it was never passed. During the debates at second reading, concerns were raised that the bill would result in increased tanker traffic and thus endanger the environment in Arctic waters.²¹

1986

The Amauligak oilfield in the Beaufort Sea yields 50,400 cubic metres of oil. This discovery is described by some as the most significant Canadian Arctic oil discovery.²²

April 11: Bill C-104, the Canadian Laws Offshore Application Act, is introduced; it does not progress beyond first reading.²³ The intention of the legislation is to provide a legal framework for extending Canadian laws, including criminal law, to the continental shelf beyond the 12-mile territorial sea, including the waters of the Arctic Archipelago. A second, successful attempt at such legislation would be made in 1989.

June 26: The Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Canada's International Relations is tabled in the House of Commons. The report, *Independence and Internationalism*, includes a recommendation for the development of a comprehensive Arctic policy.²⁴

December 4: The government issues a response to *Independence and Internationalism*. Entitled *Canada's International Relations*, the response affirms the government's commitment to a northern foreign policy in the Arctic, with particular emphasis on sovereignty, defence, commercial use of the Northwest Passage and circumpolar cooperation.²⁵

December 8: Debate occurs in the House of Commons and the opposition asks Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark whether the government authorized the presence of nuclear-powered US submarines in Arctic waters and whether Canada has an agreement with the US on the use of Canada's waters by US ships.²⁶

1987

June 5: A Defence white paper, *Challenge and Commitment: a Defence Policy for Canada*, identifies security and sovereignty considerations in the Arctic.²⁷

1988

January 11: The Canada-United States Agreement on Arctic Cooperation comes into effect. It includes a provision that all navigation by US icebreakers within waters Canada claims as internal will be undertaken with the consent of the Canadian government.²⁸

1989

October 2: The *Canadian Laws Offshore Application Act* is introduced;²⁹ it is later passed as S.C. 1990, c. C-18.5.

November 29: An agreement is signed between Canada and the USSR with respect to cooperation in the Arctic and the North.³⁰ This agreement is superseded by a new agreement in June 1992.

1990

June 19: After reviewing the case of Quebec Inuit relocated to the High Arctic, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs issues its third report, recommending that the Government of Canada apologize for and recognize the negative impact of the relocation on the people of Grise Ford and Resolute Bay.³¹

November 20: The government issues a response to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs.³²

1991

August 26: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is appointed by Order in Council.³³ Chaired by the Honourable René Dussault and Georges Erasmus, the commission will table its final report in November 1996.

1992

June 19: A new agreement is made between Canada and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the Arctic, replacing the agreement of November 1989.³⁴

June 23: The Honourable Charles L. Caccia moves that "the government should, for the benefit of Canadian fisheries, urgently take the necessary steps to ratify the International Law of the Sea, and urge other nations to do so in order to reach the 60 signatures required for the Law of the Sea to come into force."³⁵

1993

May 28: The *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 1993, c. 29.³⁶ The *Nunavut Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 1993, c. 28, and comes into force in April 1999.³⁷

1994

March 15: A Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons is created with the mandate to review Canadian foreign policy. The Committee is jointly chaired by the Honourable Senator Allan MacEachen and Jean-Robert Gauthier, Member of Parliament.³⁸

November 15: The Special Joint Committee tables its final report,³⁹ which addresses Canada's Arctic policy and recommends that the government work urgently with other states to establish the Arctic Council. The Committee recommends that membership include Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Russian Federation and the United States.⁴⁰

May 31: The *Yukon First Nations Land Claims Settlement Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 1994, c. 34. The *Yukon First Nations Self Government Act* is also introduced; it is later enacted as S.C. 1994, c. 35.⁴¹

October 28: Mary Simon is appointed Canada's first Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs. She is the first Inuk to hold an ambassadorial position.⁴²

1995

June 14: Bill C-98, the Oceans Act, is introduced in the House of Commons. It will not reach third reading, dying on the *Order Paper* with the end of the 1st Session of the 35th Parliament.

1996

September 19: The Arctic Council is established with the signing in Ottawa of a declaration to promote cooperation, coordination and interaction among Arctic states. Canada is the first chair.⁴³

April 17: The *Oceans Act* is introduced in Parliament;⁴⁴ it is later enacted as S.C. 1996, c. 31. The *Oceans Act* defines Canada's national maritime zones as consisting of Canada's internal waters, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and Canada's continental shelf. It also repeals and replaces the *Canadian Laws Offshore Application Act*.⁴⁵

November 21: The final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is tabled in the House of Commons.⁴⁶ The Commission observes that the most important challenge for the future of northern Aboriginal peoples is economic.⁴⁷

1997

April 22: The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade tables its report, *Canada and the Circumpolar North: Meeting the Challenges of Co-operation into the Twenty-First Century*.⁴⁸ The report recommends that Canada "reaffirm its claim to sovereignty over the waters of the Canadian Arctic archipelago" and suggests exploring "alternative technical and diplomatic mechanisms for advancing Canada's sovereignty position."

April 29: The government response to *Canada and the Circumpolar North* identifies growing interest in issues related to the North.⁴⁹

1999

April 1: The provisions of the *Nunavut Act* establishing the Territory of Nunavut come into force.⁵⁰

October 12: The Speech from the Throne outlines a foreign policy for the North focusing on environmental protection, trade and investment, and human security in Canada's North. It states:

To advance Canada's leadership in the Arctic region, the Government will outline a foreign policy for the North that enhances co-operation, helps protect the environment, promotes trade and investment, and supports the security of the region's people.⁵¹

December 16: A Joint Statement is issued by Canada and the European Union on Northern Cooperation:

On the eve of the new Millennium, the European Union and Canada reaffirm our shared commitment to facilitating closer cooperation between all the countries of the circumpolar and adjacent northern regions with a view to promoting sustainable development as well as environmental and human security.⁵²

2000

June 8: The Canadian government releases a policy statement entitled *The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy*.⁵³

2001

October 31: The *Yukon Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 2002, c. 7, and repeals the *Yukon Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. Y-2.⁵⁴

2002

October 3: The *Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 2003, c. 7.⁵⁵

2003

November 6: Canada ratifies the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, which it had signed on 10 December 1982. Canada has 10 years from the date of ratification, i.e., by the end of 2013, to submit its claim to the Commission.⁵⁶

2004

October 5: The Speech from the Throne announces that, for the first time, a comprehensive strategy will be developed for the North:

A region of particular challenge and opportunity is Canada's North – a vast area of unique cultural and ecological significance. The Government will develop, in cooperation with its territorial partners, Aboriginal people and other northern residents, the first-ever comprehensive strategy for the North. This northern strategy will foster sustainable economic and human development; protect the northern environment and Canada's sovereignty and security; and promote cooperation with the international circumpolar community.⁵⁷

October 19: The *Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Act* is introduced in Parliament; it is later enacted as S.C. 2005, c. 1. The Act gives effect to a land claims and self-government agreement among the Tlicho, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada, and makes amendments to other Acts.⁵⁸

2005

September 19: Canada and Denmark issue a joint statement announcing that the two countries will work together to resolve the issue of the Hans Island dispute. Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Pettigrew states:

It remains our firmly held position that Hans Island constitutes part of Canada's national territory. As longstanding allies, it is our shared objective to lead by example and resolve this matter, which we agree is about the island, and the island only. Minister Møller and I have agreed that our officials should meet soon to discuss how to move toward a resolution of this issue and report back to us.⁵⁹

To date, no formal announcement has been made as to the ultimate outcome of the dispute.

December: Canadian news sources report that a US nuclear submarine had travelled through Canadian Arctic waters in November without the permission of the Canadian government.⁶⁰

2006

April 20: A notice of written question is provided to the House of Commons by Member of Parliament Dawn Black on the subject of Arctic sovereignty, including shipping rights in the Northwest Passage and climate change.⁶¹ An answer is provided by Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay on 5 June 2006.⁶²

April 28: A permanent North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) agreement⁶³ is signed by Canada and the United States. The new agreement is subject to review at least every four years and dispenses with the need for a renewal of the agreement by both parties.⁶⁴

May 17: The *Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act* is introduced in the House of Commons;⁶⁵ it is later enacted as S.C. 2007, c. 30. The preamble to the Act recognizes that "some of the most severe impacts of climate change are already unfolding, particularly in the Arctic."

November 22: Motion P-4, moved by Ms. Black, is adopted by the House of Commons. The motion requests that a copy of any request by foreign governments to send ships, boats or submarines through the Northwest Passage be tabled in the House of Commons.⁶⁶ In response, the government provides details regarding requests for transit by US icebreakers under the *Canada–United States Agreement on Arctic Cooperation*. Submarines, as well as vessels of other countries, are not covered by treaty, and thus no information is provided about how many vessels may have traversed the passage, or whether permission was sought.⁶⁷

2007

August: News media report that two Russian mini-submarines have made an excursion to the North Pole and placed a Russian flag on the polar seabed.⁶⁸

October 16: The Speech from the Throne addresses issues relating to the Arctic, including commitments to complete a comprehensive mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed, the creation of a world-class Arctic research station and the improvement of living conditions for residents of the North.⁶⁹

October 23: Member of Parliament Larry Bagnell submits a Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers requesting "a copy of all researches, reports, documents, correspondence, memos, financial projections, ship plans and e-mails on file within the Department of National Defence pertaining to the specifications, suitability, capability, necessity, design, completion and operation of the proposed new Arctic patrol boats announced by the government."⁷⁰

2008

January 28: Mr. Bagnell submits a Notice of Motion (M-438) that "the government should enact regulations to eliminate the dumping of any waste from all vessels travelling in Arctic waters." The motion is placed on the Order of Precedence on June 5, but may not be moved pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(1).

Mr. Bagnell also submits a Notice of Motion that:

the government should modify its policy on Arctic sovereignty and rename the waterway now known as the "Northwest Passage" as the "Canadian Arctic Passage" and that all future Canadian-produced maps and text books, government and other documents that label and make reference to the passage recognize the renaming of the Arctic waterway as the "Canadian Arctic Passage."⁷¹

May 28: The *Ilulissat Declaration* is adopted by Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States. The five countries reaffirm that competing claims in the Arctic would be decided according to the framework established by international treaties governing the region.⁷²

June 9: Member of Parliament Daryl Kramp submits a Notice of Motion that "all government references to the water passage between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans be now renamed the 'Canadian Northwest Passage.'"⁷³

June 23: The Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans deposits with the Clerk of the Senate *The Coast Guard in Canada's Arctic: Interim Report*.⁷⁴

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SOURCES

1. This chronology does not list all statutes affecting the territories of the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Many legislative steps have been taken over the years, especially in recent decades, to increase the territories' jurisdiction over areas previously controlled more closely by the federal government. For the most part, these legislative changes are not listed in this chronology. For a historical overview of the devolution of powers to the territories, see Mary C. Hurley, *Bill C-39, The Yukon Act*, LS-422E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 3 April 2002, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/1/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/summaries/c39-e.pdf>.
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